

Jytte Klausen: *The cartoons that shook the world*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2009, 256 pp.

In her book *The Cartoons that Shook the World* Jytte Klausen, Professor of Comparative Politics at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, describes the controversy following the publication of Muhammad caricatures in September 2005 in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The reader might be puzzled by the title, and Jytte Klausen does not really offer a convincing argument for using the word 'cartoon' instead of caricature, but the book is cleverly composed and deserves to become a standard reference for this question. It is interesting, well written and profits from the author's Danish background. It offers a very good and informative outline of the chronology, and Jytte Klausen should be praised for her ability to integrate the developments in the Muslim world, too.

To Danes, who had seen many American or Israeli flags being burned by angry demonstrators, it was a shock to see their own beloved flag being destroyed in the same way. This sent a clear signal that Denmark had arrived in a globalised world. To most people who perceive themselves to be living in the best of all democracies it turned out to be a dramatic experience, but Jytte Klausen is right in putting the importance of this 'crisis',

which the Danes themselves tend to inflate, into perspective. It was not, in fact, all about Denmark, and Jytte Klausen presents some interesting documentation that sheds light upon the construction of the whole affair. Even the importance of a worldwide Internet cannot explain how a few caricatures in an internationally almost unknown Danish provincial newspaper could trigger such a reaction, and there would have been no bloody demonstrations in Pakistan and elsewhere if there had not been people succeeding in instrumentalising the affair for their own purposes. Seen from this perspective the rage against the caricatures did not primarily target Denmark. Jytte Klausen quotes Arabic sources to make this point but it shows that this 'crisis' like all other similar cases in history can only be interpreted as a construction: it was part of a much broader reaction against Western politics after the 9/11 attacks.

We also learn quite a lot about Denmark. Many elements of the 'crisis' reflected an arrogant and self-satisfied national culture that was suddenly confronted with the surprising fact that the rest of the world did not share its values and norms of the Danes. Seen in a Danish context, the caricatures could hardly be considered very

provocative. Targetting religious symbols and figures is nothing exceptional in a political culture where Church and religion play a minor role. Therefore one of the most interesting aspects of this book is how this debate led different cultural ideas in different countries to confront each other. To their surprise, the Danes discovered that British and American newspapers and politicians, in particular, did not at all support the publishing, although these two political cultures normally count a lot in the opinion of most Danes and generally are considered to be close allies.

Something similar could be seen in the question of whether the government should apologise. The fact that Danes do not understand an apology in the same way as the British, Americans or Arabs was a complicating factor. Danes do not apologize for something they did not do, and the government acted along this line. Here, the historical role of a self-confident democracy in a small nation state probably also led to negative reactions, when delegations from outside tried to address problems like the rules and norms of Danish press and democracy, which the Danes were hardly willing to discuss with foreigners.

Fortunately, this book is not trying to be provocative. Jytte Klausen succeeds in giving a balanced description, even if one sometimes might wish for less political correctness. It is easier not to try to understand the position of the protagonists of 'rightwing' politics, but some arguments against a multicultural approach should be taken more seriously as signs of a general disquiet in the population. It is too easy to reject those positions by making comparisons to Nazism. In a Danish context, if somebody talks about *kulturkamp*, it has nothing to do with Nazism (p. 156).

The book caused a scandal even before it was published in 2009. The renowned publisher, Yale University Press, suddenly decided not to include the caricatures that the text was all about. This decision was another example of the strange and often embarrassing self-censorship that has spread in Western democracies since the Muhammad caricature crisis. The author did not, of course, support this decision; in the end, it can be interpreted as an ironic comment on the crisis. It is strange to prevent the reader from seeing these caricatures in a book that describes them and the crisis they provoked.

*Steen Bo Frandsen (Sønderborg)*